

Testimony in Support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers

Human Services Committee
Bridgeport Prospers
February 21, 2023

Dear Senator Lesser, Representative Gilchrest, and esteemed members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Talyn Cook and I live in Bridgeport, Connecticut. I stand in support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers. I serve as the Community Engagement Manager at United Way of Coastal Fairfield County under Bridgeport Prospers which, we work to advance equitable change and promote the well-being of Bridgeport's children, youth, and families through authentic partnerships with civic, community, and organizational leaders. Our vision and guiding principles involve shifting power to our communities through partnership, advancing racial and economic equity, collaboration through our collective impact model, and making data informed decisions through the data we collect. Currently, Connecticut's Medicaid program does not reimburse Community Health Worker (CHW) services or incentivize health care providers to work with CHWs. Community health workers are an effective way to address inequities and promote health, particularly for low-income households served by Medicaid.

The Community Messenger program under Bridgeport Prospers is a model of trusted messengers to learn, gather, and disseminate information and resources to the community. We have a great group of individuals from all walks of life working in either education, healthcare, or business trying to advocate equity for all. We currently have a number of members who are community health workers in the city of Bridgeport or are CHW educators trying to expand access of this amazing opportunity to as many as they can. Hearing their stories of how much easier it is for them to connect community to resources that most practitioners try to do in our city is very inspiring, yet takes a great deal of capacity. Community Health Workers usually come from the community they serve so they have a better understanding of the needs that are on the ground which in turn creates a better experience and increased trust with the folks they wish to serve. This is a job that should be recognized and reimbursed because they essentially serve as the bridge for healthcare workers and community.

Tying community benefit programs to the needs identified by communities in the Community Health Needs Assessment process and defining community participation are critical in ensuring community programs advance health equity. We believe Community Health Works impact health equity in a big way simply because they can help healthcare organizations, improve healthcare quality, and strengthen relationships between healthcare practitioners and community. There are many roles a CHW can serve in, but ultimately they are uniquely positioned to respond to the needs of individuals whether it's through care coordination, direct service, advocacy, coaching, cultural mediation, or culturally appropriate health education just to name a few they play a vital role in an individual's health journey.

Medicaid reimbursement for community health workers should:

- Center community and CHW voices in all stages of design and implementation
- Reimburse at rates high enough to employ CHWs at a livable wage and cover the costs of supervision, billing, and routine training
- Cover a comprehensive list of CHW services

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 991, An Act Concerning Medicaid Reimbursement for Community Health Workers.

Sincerely,

Talyn Cook
Bridgeport Prospers – United Way of Coastal Fairfield County